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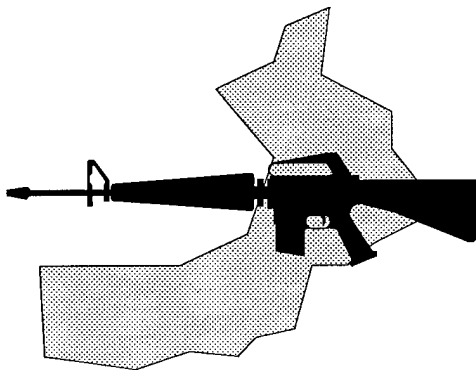
**AIR UNIVERSITY**

**THE FIGHT FOR OMAN 1963-1975**

**ANALYSIS OF CIVIL-MILITARY OPERATIONS  
IN  
LOW-INTENSITY CONFLICT  
AND ITS  
RELEVANCE TO CURRENT WORLD CONFLICT**

by

**Robert R. Sarnoski  
Lt Col, USAF**



**A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY**

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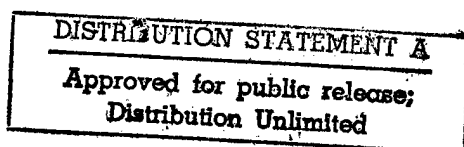
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**Advisor: Colonel Donald E. Waddell, III**

**MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

**TITLE: The Fight for Oman 1963-1975 Analysis of Civil-Military Operations in Low-Intensity Conflict and Its Relevance to Current World Conflict**

**AUTHOR: Robert R. Sarnoski, Lieutenant Colonel, USAF**

The recent collapse of the Warsaw Pact and Soviet Union considerably reduced the threat of major conventional and nuclear conflict. The peace dividends associated with these momentous events, however, did not extend into the arena of low intensity conflict. Current global unrest suggests low intensity conflict is a significant and perhaps growing threat. While often overlooked, the government response to the 1963-1975 insurgency in Oman provides excellent examples of both ineffective and effective national-military strategies for combating a low intensity threat. Analysis of the Oman insurgency indicates that an effective national-military strategy recognizes the primacy of civil operations. Nevertheless, threatened governments must carefully integrate civil and military operations to eliminate insurgent power bases. The relevance of the Oman insurgency to current world affairs is evident in the highly volatile condition existing between Turkey and the Kurdistan Workers Party.

## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

**Lieutenant Colonel Sarnoski received a Bachelor of Science degree from the United States Air Force Academy in 1977 and a Masters of Business Administration from Webster College in 1981. He has been interested in the 1963-1975 insurgency in Oman since studying low intensity conflict at the Army Command and General Staff College in Leavenworth, Kansas (1991-1992). Colonel Sarnoski is a command pilot with over 2700 hours of flying time. As an F-117A pilot in Operation DESERT STORM, he holds two Air Medals. Colonel Sarnoski is a graduate of Squadron Officer School, Air Command and Staff College, Marine Command and Staff College, Army Command and General Staff College, and Armed Forces Staff College.**

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# **CHAPTER I**

## **INTRODUCTION**

*If historical experience teaches us anything about revolutionary guerrilla war, it is that military measures alone will not suffice. (17:5)*

*Mao Tse-tung*

The nature of warfare has gradually changed with time. Today, modern warfare includes not only the well-known conventional and nuclear scenarios, but also the less understood spectrum of low intensity conflict. While the recent collapse of the Warsaw Pact and Soviet Union reduced the threat of major conventional and nuclear conflict, the peace dividends associated with these two momentous events did not extend into the arena of low intensity conflict. Figure 1 clearly shows the probability of low intensity conflict (LIC) is much higher than either conventional (CONV) or nuclear (NUC) conflict. Incidents between rival

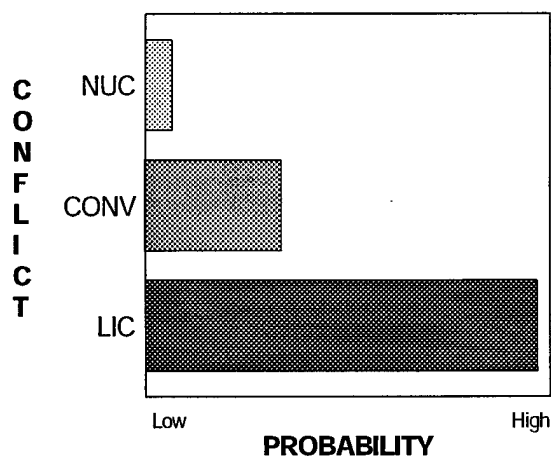


Figure 1 Probability of Conflict (30:110)

ethnic groups, religious sects, and other factions continue to cause instability around the globe. Anthony James Joes, author of Modern Guerrilla Insurgency states:

Over large areas of the globe festering problems, including increasing population pressures, persistent inequalities between city and countryside, and-above all-unresolved ethnic and religious resentments and conflicts, have created or aggravated explosive situations. (17:5)

Hence, low intensity conflict is a significant and perhaps growing threat around the world today.

As Mao Tse-tung alludes in the opening quotation, military measures alone are seldom enough to defeat an adversary in low intensity conflict. In low intensity conflict, the government response must carefully integrate civil and military operations to counteract and eliminate insurgent power bases. Army Field Manual 100-20 Military Operations in Low Intensity Conflict states: "Insurgencies succeed by mobilizing human and material resources to provide both active and passive support for their programs, operations and goals." (14:2-1) Therefore, a well-planned government response will embrace a civil-military strategy that at least addresses if not includes balanced development, security, mobilization, and neutralization elements. (14:2-8) Civil operations will normally assume the leading role. Unfortunately, it is often extremely difficult for governments "to grasp and hold on tightly to the idea that insurgency is a profoundly political problem." (17:209) Because low intensity conflict is predominantly a political problem, it is essential that military operations support civil operations by creating or enhancing conditions for civil action and development.

While often overlooked, the 1963-1975 insurgency in Oman provides excellent examples of both ineffective and effective national-military strategies for combating a low intensity threat. This paper will analyze the national-military strategies employed by the government of Oman during the 1963-1975 insurgency, ascertain lessons learned and assess the value of the Omani experience to the current world situation.

To accomplish this task, the paper will be divided into four parts. This paper will:

- (1) Establish a baseline of knowledge by briefly discussing important elements of Oman's background (geography, history, government, and economy);
- (2) Discuss the insurgency by examining regional influences and analyzing the strategies developed by the Dhofar

**Liberation Front and the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf;**

**(3) Discuss the counterinsurgency by analyzing the strategies developed by Sultan Sa'id and Sultan Qaboos and extracting the major lessons learned from these strategies; (4) Discuss the value of the Omani experience to current world conflict by assessing its relevance to the highly volatile condition existing between Turkey and the Kurdistan Workers Party.**



## **CHAPTER II**

### **BACKGROUND**

*Know the enemy, know yourself; your victory will never be endangered. Know the ground, know the weather; your victory will then be total. (32:129)*

*Sun Tzu*

The 1963-1975 insurgency in Oman cannot be fully understood without first studying local and regional geography, history of the emerging nation, form of government, and basis of the national economy.

#### **Geography**

Oman is strategically located at the southeastern corner of the Arabian peninsula. It is surrounded by the Gulf of Oman in the north, the Arabian Sea in the east and south, and Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates in the west (Figure 2). Much of the western border (excluding Yemen) is composed of the barren and



sandy expanse of the Rub al-Khali desert (The Empty Quarter). Approximately the size of New Mexico, Oman is a country of predominantly rough, but varied terrain. Arid climatological conditions limits availability of surface fresh water. As a result, wells compose the main source of water for much of the rural population. Vegetation is generally limited except in some higher elevations and irrigated areas. The country itself is composed

of two major regions. These regions are Oman (including the separate enclave Ru'us al-Jibal) in the north and Dhofar in the south.

With approximately 450,000 inhabitants, the region of Oman in the north is dominated by the mountains of Al-Hajar (10,000 ft elevation). Muscat, the capital of Oman is located along the coast at the southeastern end of the mountains. Between the Gulf of Oman and the mountains is Batinah, a narrow coastal plain. Approximately 150 miles long, Batinah contains the majority of the country's population. The Ru'us al-Jibal is a separate enclave in the north along the Gulf of Oman and Straits of Hormuz.

Approximately 370 miles south of the Al-Hajar Mountains across a barren gravel desert is the Dhofar region. With approximately 50,000 inhabitants, the Dhofar region contains fertile grasslands, forested areas, and barren areas. Dominated by three small mountain belts, Dhofar is crossed by numerous wadis. Along the coast is a narrow thirty mile long coastal plain called the Salalah Plain. Most of Dhofar's population live along the Salalah Plain. On the far side of the mountains, gravel plains extend to the Rub al-Khali desert. The Dhofar region, unlike Oman in the north, experiences a monsoon season from July to August. Heavy surf along the Dhofar coast, particularly during the monsoon season, makes waterborne operations difficult.

### History

Oman has a long and complicated history spanning several thousand years. While events of the early years are not well documented, history does suggest there are three underlying themes that define Oman's character. (11:829) These themes are "the tribal nature of society, the traditional Ibadhite Imamate form of government, and its maritime tradition." (11:829)

Two successive migrations occurred in Oman's early history. "The first brought Yemeni from the south, the latter introduced Adnani from north central Arabia." (8:18) These early inhabitants created a tribal society that continues to the present time. The inhabitants of the Dhofar region are historically tied to southern Arabia. (11:829) Ethnically akin to the inhabitants of eastern Yemen, the mountain people (Jabalīs) of Dhofar developed a distinct language separate from modern Arabic. (11:828)

Islam took root in Oman in the seventh and eighth centuries. While many forms of Islam exist, a large portion of Oman's interior population accepted Ibadhism. This form of Islam is distinct in that the leader or Imam is chosen based on merit and not membership (heredity) in Muhammad's tribe or immediate family. (2:10-11) Ibadhi tribes of the interior later formed a separate state called the Imamate. Selection of the Imam, rivalry between the Imamate and Sultanate, and the tribal nature of society contributed to recurring political turmoil.

Western influence came to Oman with the arrival of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century. Following expulsion of the Portuguese in the mid seventeenth century, Oman began a period of maritime expansion. (27:1) By the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Oman's influence extended to West Asia and East Africa. (27:1) Relations with the British began in the eighteenth century as British colonial imperialism expanded to the Middle East.

Civil war in the early eighteenth century reversed the maritime expansion of Oman. The Persians entered Oman for a time, but were expelled by Ahmed bin Sa'id. In 1744, election of Ahmed bin Sa'id as Imam initiated the reign of the al-Bu Said family, the current ruling dynasty of Oman. (27:1) In 1786, Imam Ahmed bin Sa'id moved the capital

from the interior to Muscat. As a result, "the temporal power came to be divided between the Imamate inland and the coastal Sultanate; the first weak and ineffective, the latter oriented toward trade and recognized by Great Britain and other European powers." (8:19)

In 1839, the Sultanate annexed the Dhofar region. By the end of the nineteenth century, Oman was in a period of economic decline. Internal problems between the Imamate and Sultanate continued periodically until the signing of the Treaty of Sib in 1920. Sultan Sa'id bin Taimir united Oman in 1959. By the early 1960s, popular discontent in the Dhofar region began to increase.

#### Government and Economy

In 1963, Oman is an independent Sultanate. Succession is hereditary. "Absolute power is vested in the Sultan who combines supreme executive, legislative, judicial, and military authority." (2:81) Justice is based on Shair'ia law (Koran).

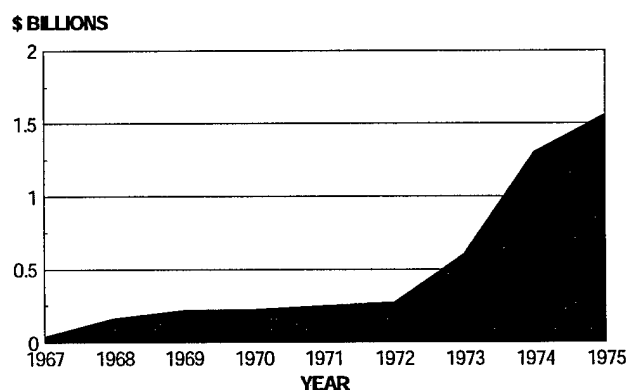
In 1931, shortly before receiving the formal title of Sultan, Sa'id bin Taimir eliminated the council of ministers and replaced it with the departments of finance, internal affairs, and justice. (2:76) The notable absence of a department of external affairs or other related ministry would be indicative of Sa'id bin Taimir's future aversion to outside influences. After deposing his father Sultan Sa'id in 1970, Sultan Qaboos reinstituted the council of ministers. Sultan Qaboos expanded the institution by adding the ministries of education, health, justice, information, labor, social affairs, and economy. (2:80)

The interaction of tribalism, Imamate, and Sultanate produced considerable political turmoil in Oman. While the Treaty of Sib stabilized the situation for many years, the Imamate-Sultanate rivalry surfaced again in 1954 upon the death of Imam Muhammad

bin Abduhllah al-Khalili. His successor initiated an interior secessionist movement that the Sultan quickly ended. Problems began again with a restoration movement in 1957. With the help of the British, the Sultan regained control of the interior. Key leaders from the movement, however, escaped to Saudi Arabia.

Since the beginning of his rule, Sultan Sa'id maintained a close hold on the economy. (2:77) "The treasury was entirely dependent on customs revenues, the zakat (religious tax) collected on agricultural produce, and loans and subsidies from the British." (2:89) Due to self-imposed isolation and a subsistence economy based on dates, limes, fruits, and vegetables, Oman lacked the investment capital for internal improvement. (27:2) The British enticed Sultan Sa'id to begin some internal development by tying it to military aid. (2:91) This limited development included ". . . setting up health facilities, building roads to Sohar and up Wadi Sama'il, establishing agricultural centers in Sohar and Nizwa, and operating the two boy's schools in the capital area." (2:91) All development, however, took place in the north.

During the reign of Sultan Sa'id, Oman remained essentially a backward nation. In the late 1950s, the Dhofar region experienced a severe drought that disrupted the agricultural and cattle based economy. Hundreds of Dhofaris left for surrounding nations to find work in the growing oil industry. In 1964,



discovery of oil in Oman created a new source of national income. Figure 3 depicts oil revenue from 1967 to 1975. By the accession of Sultan Qaboos in 1970, significant oil

revenue became available for internal development. Using the new resources wisely, Sultan Qaboos instituted a country-wide modernization program.

### **Summary**

Strategically located at the southeastern corner of the Arabian peninsula, Oman is a country of predominantly rough, but varied terrain. A large barren gravel desert separates the country into two major regions--Oman in the north and Dhofar in the south. Successive migrations during Oman's early history produced a land inhabited by many tribes. Oman eventually evolved into two states--the Imamate and Sultanate. In 1839, the Sultanate annexed the Dhofar region. Rivalry between the Imamate and Sultanate contributed to frequent political turmoil until being united by Sultan Sa'id bin Taimir in 1959. Under Sultan Sa'id, Oman remained a backward nation due to self-imposed isolation and minimal internal development. Severe economic conditions in the late 1950s forced many Dhofaris to seek work in surrounding nations. Exposed to Arab nationalism and other external influences, returning Dhofaris contributed to a growing popular discontent within the Dhofar region. The next chapter examines the insurgency.

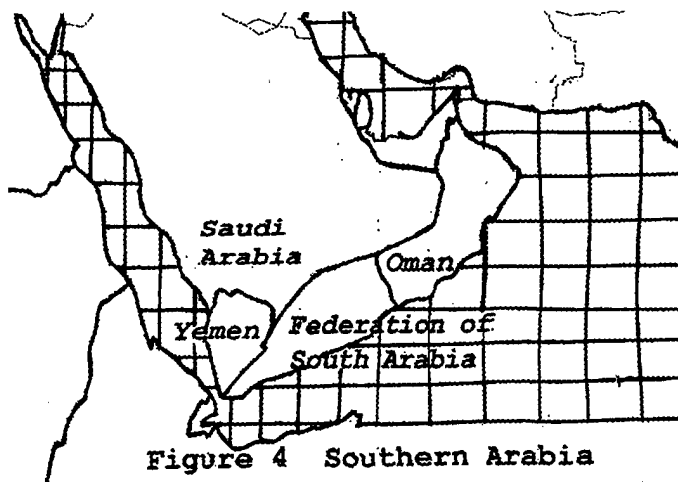
## CHAPTER III

### **INSURGENCY**

*If the army is confused and suspicious, neighboring rulers will cause trouble. This is what is meant by the saying: 'A confused army leads to another's victory.' (32:82)*

*Sun Tzu*

By the time of the Dhofar rebellion in 1963, Arab nationalism was already entrenched in many parts of the Middle East. Almost all of the southern portion of the Arabian peninsula experienced some form of struggle related to either modernization verses traditionalism or autonomy verses colonialism. Rising nationalism in these neighboring nations influenced either directly or indirectly the insurgency in Oman. Understanding the regional situation provides additional insight into the Oman insurgency.



This chapter briefly examines two nationalistic struggles that influenced the 1963-1975 insurgency in Oman. These struggles are the 1962-1970 rebellion in Yemen and the 1963-1967 rebellion in the Federation of South Arabia (Figure 4). Chapter III then concludes with an analysis of the Oman insurgent effort.

### Region

Like Oman, Yemen existed as a very traditional, tribal society. Ruled for a thousand years by the Zeidi Imams, Yemen remained a relatively backward nation closed to outside influences. (10:206-207) Following a border war with Saudi Arabia in 1934, the Imam recognized the necessity to improve his military's capability. (10:207) As a result, selected military personnel trained in Egypt and Iraq. These military personnel along with other individuals who worked outside Yemen were exposed to other social and political alternatives. (10:207) The seeds of discontent became rooted in a small but growing element of people dissatisfied with the existing regime.

Unable to contain their dissatisfaction with the existing political and social order, the army led a revolt in September 1962. The revolutionaries or Republicans established the new Yemen Arab Republic. In the interests of Arab nationalism, the United Arab Republic (Egypt) provided men and equipment in support of the Republicans. The Saudis, viewing the conflict as a potential threat to disputed territory and their traditional society, provided support to the former government or Royalists. (10:209)

Peace initiatives brokered by the United States failed. Ultimately, the United Nations succeeded in negotiating a disengagement agreement. The British were particularly happy with the proposed plan due to the threat Egyptian troops and radical Arab nationalism posed to the Federation of South Arabia (Aden Protectorates). (10:210) The disengagement agreement was never successfully implemented. The United Nations Yemen Observation Mission (UNYOM) sent to monitor the disengagement agreement withdrew in September 1964. Following the withdrawal of UNYOM, "relations between the parties steadily improved and issues were resolved between them." (34:197)



The rebellion in Yemen did not go unnoticed by its eastern neighbors. Arab nationalism also took hold in the Federation of South Arabia. In an effort to prepare the area for independence from colonialism, Britain assembled the many political entities within the former Aden Protectorates into a federation. (6:129) The new regime in the neighboring Yemen Arab Republic, however, greatly increased tensions throughout the region. Robin Corbett in Guerrilla Warfare From 1939 to the Present states:

The neighboring state of Yemen . . . had a long standing claim to the territories of the Federation, a claim which was stated with renewed vigour [sic] after the Imam of Yemen was ousted by a radical, republican regime in September 1962. This new regime was backed by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, and without delay Nasser and his Yemeni allies launched into a powerful propaganda offensive against the Federation. From radio stations in Cairo and Yemen a torrent of invective was beamed specifically at South Arabia, denouncing the Federal leaders as puppets of colonialism, and calling upon the people to revolt against the Federal authorities and their British masters. (6:129)

In June 1963, revolutionary minded individuals formed the National Liberation Front (NLF).

In addition to freeing the Federation of South Arabia of colonialism, the NLF committed itself to establishment of an independent Marxist state. As time progressed, the NLF grew in strength and "became skilled in the use of small arms, grenades, mortars, mines and bazookas, items which were brought in from the Yemen or 'acquired' from the government armories." (6:134) Military operations conducted by the Federal Regular Army and British forces could not eliminate the NLF threat. Unable to control the situation, the British ultimately decided for a total withdrawal from the Federation of South Arabia. The announcement destroyed confidence in the government and sealed its final demise. (6:134)

Shortly after the British withdrawal in November 1967, the NLF formed the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY). The PDRY soon began to propagate Arab nationalism beyond its borders by exporting nationalism and Marxist philosophy to the Dhofar. While the British were unsuccessful in dealing with radical Arab nationalism in the Federation of South Arabia, they would have another opportunity to deal with this very troublesome force in Oman.

### *Insurgent Activity in Oman*

The insurgency in Oman from 1963 to 1975 can be divided into four phases. (27:i) These phases are: Phase 1 1963-1967; Phase 2 1967-1970; Phase 3 1970-1972; and Phase 4 1972-1975. While details of these four phases are summarized in Figure 5, the following analysis will separate insurgent activity into two periods. The first period corresponds to Phase 1 (1963-1967) and is associated with the time before active PDRY involvement. During this period, the Dhofar Liberation Front (DLF) exerted the primary influence over the insurgency. The second period corresponds to Phase 2, 3 and 4 and is associated with the period of active PDRY involvement. During this time, the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG) exerted the primary influence over the insurgency.

Phase 1	1963-67	Dissidents organized under cover of charitable association; first attack in 1963; congress of 1964 endorsed principle of armed struggle; attempted assassination of Sultan; Saudi Arabia cut off aid and guerrillas under pressure.
Phase 2	1967-70	Independence for Aden led to more active insurgency with increased PDRY aid; strategy of revolutionary violence accompanied by attempt to escalate tribal revolt into mass popular movement, with coercive measures against Jabalis.
Phase 3	1970-72	Guerrillas trained in Iraq, China, PDRY and Palestinian refugee camps. Counter-revolution in Jabali area set off defections to government. Ruler's son, Sultan Qaboos, took over, invigorated counterinsurgency and development plans. Following disastrous guerrilla failure in Dhofar attack, Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) forced insurgents into Jabal towards PDRY border.
Phase 4	1972-75	Insurgents on defensive in Dhofar; changed strategy, with more emphasis on political struggle; northern Oman raid foiled, but evidence of insurgent infiltration of government posts, insurgency ends.

Figure 5 Phases of Oman Insurgency (27:i)

1963-1967

Discontent in Oman began in the mountains of the Dhofar region. Having a somewhat separate identity, the Jabalis (mountain people) felt the national policies of Sultan Sa'id bin Taimir provided inadequate emphasis on regional civil development. (27:3) Geographically isolated from the more populated and affluent northern region of Oman, the tribesmen in Dhofar lacked access to education, medical treatment, and other necessities.

Following the severe drought in the late 1950s, many Dhofaris left Oman for the oil fields of neighboring nations. There, they met individuals opposed to the Sultan while also experiencing the very affluence they wanted for their homeland. "They, with others, absorbed the ideas of Arab nationalism and Marxism." (27:3) After returning home, it

became apparent the Sultan would not address their grievances. As a result, discontented Dhofaris initiated a guerrilla campaign against the Sultan.

Repressive actions on the part of the Sultan only served to anger more Dhofaris. Ultimately, the rebels formed the Dhofar Liberation Front (16:24) Their basic motivations are described in the following passage from SAS: Operation Oman:

It appears to have been a party motivated by high ideals and mainly pledged to bringing modernisation [sic] to Dhofar. Its slogan was 'Dhofar for the Dhofaris' . . . In tone, although opposing sultanic rule, it was conservative, maintaining the tribal structure and encouraging traditional religion. (16:24-25)

Figure 6 illustrates the insurgent strategy during the period 1963-1967.

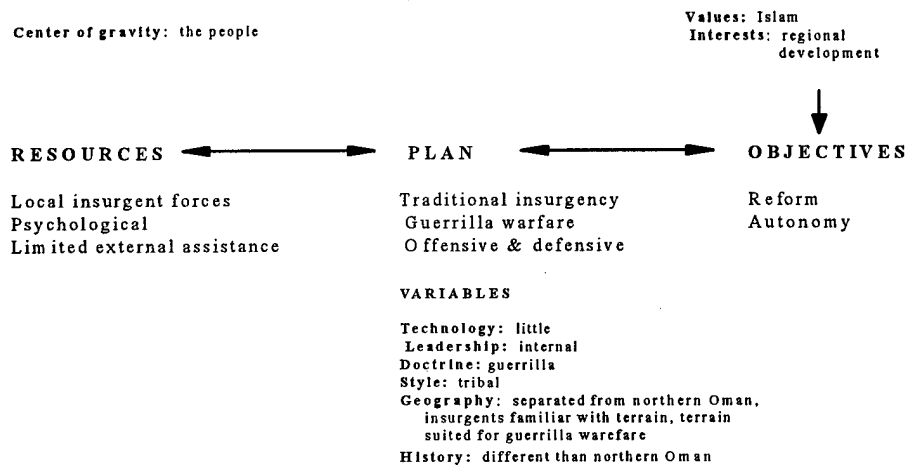


Figure 6 Snyder Model --Strategy 1963-1967

The basic strategy called for a traditional insurgency. The Dhofar tribesman were fundamentally interested in regional development. Led by Musselim bin Nufl, the DLF became the guiding organization for the insurgency. (6:135) The overall effort, however, remained essentially fragmented.

Due to the Sultan's continued intransigence, the objective shifted from reform to regional autonomy for the Dhofar province. While DLF members were committed to the

attainment of this objective, they never "gained the popular support necessary for a general uprising." (2:70) The DLF recognized "the people" represented the center of gravity, however they were not able to fully develop the psychological element of power.

The insurgents enjoyed a very favorable operating environment. First, the insurgents operated on their own home terrain. Familiarity proved extremely advantageous when attacking or hiding from the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF). Second, the terrain concealed movements of the insurgents and impeded rapid maneuver of the SAF. Finally, weather during the monsoon season further complicated an already difficult problem for SAF operations in the mountain areas.

The insurgency during this period remained essentially an internal problem for Oman. The DLF received limited external "aid from neighboring Arab countries that had border disputes or other grievances against the Sultan." (5:53) The aid, however, was not enough to give the insurgents a decided advantage over the SAF. Guerrilla activities included sabotage, sniping, ambushes and even an assassination attempt on the Sultan in Salalah. (27:4) "The few limited clashes that took place produced few casualties on either side, and, by the mid-1960s, the conflict seemed to be stalemated." (6:136)

#### 1967-1975

After the formation of the Marxist Peoples Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) in 1967, the Oman insurgency took on a distinct Marxist orientation. Marxist elements seized the opportunity to transfer an initial traditional insurgency into a mass-oriented insurgency. The following passage from Oman-The Modernization of the Sultinate describes the radical change:

Radical leftist elements under Muhammad b. Ahmad al Ghassani, a native of Salalah, gained control of the movement and sought to change it from a poorly organized tribal revolt against specific grievances into an international socialist, Arab nationalist, ideological struggle against imperialist forces throughout the Gulf Region. (2:70)

The organization renamed itself the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG). The insurgent organization established the typical pyramid structure shown in Figure 7. Figure 8 illustrates the strategy during the period 1967-1975.

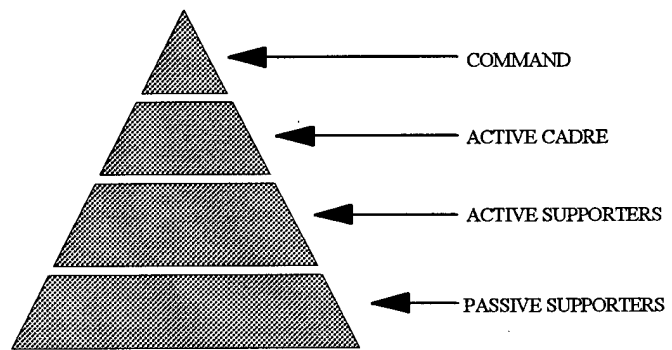


Figure 7 Insurgent Structure (36:123)

The new Marxist orientation called for a strategy based on a mass-oriented insurgency. This strategy envisioned a mass popular uprising to overthrow the Sultan, replacing him with a Marxist government. Therefore, the objective changed from just regional autonomy for the Dhofar to a new form of autonomy for all of Oman. In fact, the PDRY Marxists envisioned using Oman as a stepping stone to further liberation around the Arabian peninsula. (6:136)

Increased external support gave the insurgents an advantage over the poorly trained and equipped SAF. Countries like the Soviet Union and China provided support through the PDRY. (6:136) Other countries like Saudi Arabia, for example, withdrew support once they realized the new direction of the insurgency. (5:57) Weapons such as AK47 rifles, RPG7 rocket launchers, 75mm and 82mm recoilless guns, and 81mm and 82mm mortars flowed across the PDRY border into the Dhofar. (6:136) External support increased in

importance as the SAF improved both equipment and training. Without appropriate external support, the insurgency could not ultimately succeed.

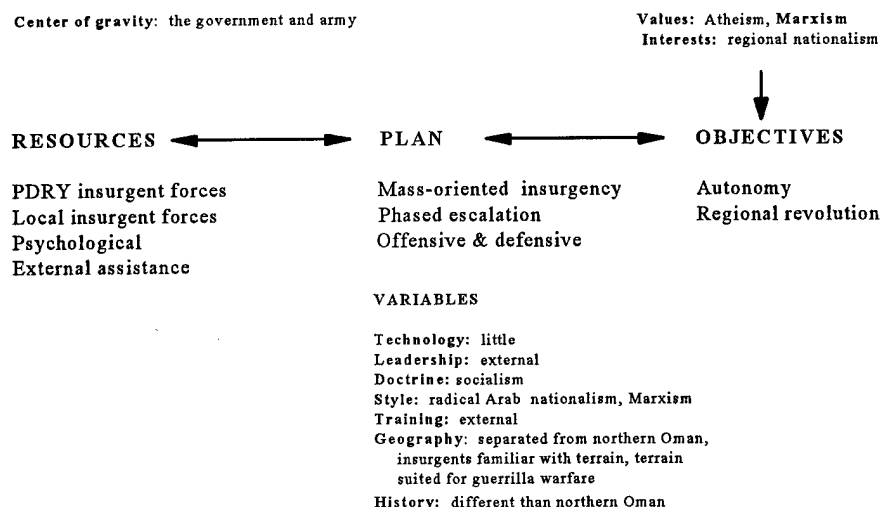


Figure 8 Snyder Model --Strategy 1967-1975

The PFLOAG operations initially met with a great deal of success. Robin Corbett states: "Most of Dhofar's interior came to be dominated by the insurgents, of whom by 1970-1971 there were 2000 full-time guerrillas supported by perhaps 3000-4000 part-time militia." (6:136) The use of the PDRY as a form of sanctuary gave the insurgents a useful advantage. Individual skills were improved by sending selected individuals abroad for training and education.

Leadership in the PFLOAG took an unfamiliar orientation. The new leadership, influenced by the Marxist PDRY, attempted to replace tribal values and Islam with Marxism and atheism. This approach met with some resistance amongst the traditional Dhofaris. Harsh punishment, however, suppressed the more vocal members as evidenced by the following passage from Ranulph Fiennes' Where Soldiers Fear to Tread:

Many of the older folk tried to stir the communities against these new doctrines but this ceased when two especially vociferous old sheiks of the Eastern Mahra had their eyes burnt out in public.

The ceremony had been conducted with a fire-heated pocket knife by the nephew of one of the two sheiks. The nephew had but recently returned from Iraq and was especially talented at converting his kin to Marxism. After the operation on his uncle and the other patriarch, neither of who [sic] died for several days, he made the words of Karl Marx heard above their screams. And the gathered jebalis listened without understanding to the new phrases of politics and the ranting of the khaki-clad youngster whom everyone remembered as an idle child, good only at shirking his duties with the cattle. They failed to see why they should stop praying, why Islam should be discredited, nor why such happenings as they had just witnessed should lead the way to a new and glorious life. But they understood the meaning of the young men's gleaming weapons and bandoliers [sic]. So they began to concur. (12:133)

As a result of the new approach, the PFLOAG created additional problems that were perhaps unanticipated. The new objective of an "ideological struggle against imperialist forces throughout the Gulf Region" (2:70) was not even related to the original intent of the rebellious Dhofaris. Most Dhofaris were not committed to this end. The Marxist concepts preached by the ideological leaders were unfamiliar. The Marxist teachings against Islam were unacceptable.

The PFLOAG committed a strategic error by misidentifying the center of gravity. Instead of concentrating on the people, the PFLOAG focused their main attention on the government and the army. Their methodology alienated the Dhofaris, resulting in a psychological element of power based mainly on coercion. Perhaps recognizing the campaign was not progressing as anticipated, the insurgent organization changed its name in 1974 from the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf to the People's Front for the Liberation of Oman. (1:23)



### **Summary**

Beginning in the mountains of the Dhofar region, the traditional insurgency could not achieve its objectives without additional external assistance. The PDRY was more than willing to fill this void. Fresh from its own nationalistic victory, PDRY elements transformed the Omani conflict into a mass-oriented insurgency based on Marxist ideology. While achieving some initial success, key strategic errors by the insurgents produced vulnerabilities readily exploitable by the government. The next chapter examines the counterinsurgency.

# **CHAPTER IV**

## **COUNTERINSURGENCY**

*The political object-the original motive for the war-will thus determine both the military objective to be reached and the amount of effort it requires. (35:81)*

*Carl von Clausewitz*

The insurgency in Oman started small and grew in size until the entire Dhofar province was essentially controlled by the insurgents. The strategy pursued by Sultan Sa'id proved inadequate in dealing with the problem. Perhaps as Clausewitz suggests in the above quotation, Sultan Sa'id did not fully understand the political object, its relationship to the military objective, and the effort required. The accession of Sultan Qaboos, however, introduced a new strategy in the fight for Oman. Sultan Qaboos' strategy, in contrast, demonstrated a sensitivity for and an understanding of the political object, the military objective, and the effort required to obtain victory. This chapter will analyze the Omani national-military strategies developed by Sultan Sa'id (1963-1970) and Sultan Qaboos (1970-1975) and identify the lessons learned.

### **Sultan Sa'id**

Frustrated by the constant internal turmoil of the north, Sultan Sa'id left the capital of Muscat for the palace at Salalah (along the Dhofar coast). (2:69) While remaining isolated from normal government affairs, he continued to alienate himself from the Dhofaris by ruling the province as a personal fief while doing little to improve their daily lives. (6:136) The following passage from Who Will Win? describes Sultan Sa'id's ineffective leadership style:

He ruled Dhofar in an absolute manner and cleverly played one tribe off against another so as to maintain control. He restricted movements of the inhabitants, monopolized trade and commerce, and personally observed the behavior of all his subjects. Depending on one's preconceptions, he was either single-minded or pig-headed, financially cautious or parsimonious, careful and conservative or paranoid. He fought all modernization and change because he thought they would spoil the people and lead them down a false path to unrest and instability. Even after the discovery of oil, which provided limited but needed revenues to the old sultan, he refused to share it with the people. (5:51)

The Dhofar tribesmen initially sought internal government reform to improve their conditions. Sultan Sa'id, however, proved inflexible. He viewed civil development as a western encroachment on traditional Omani society. Sultan Sa'id's narrow-minded policies created a perception of injustice among the Dhofar tribesmen. Anthony Joes states in his book Modern Guerrilla Insurgency:

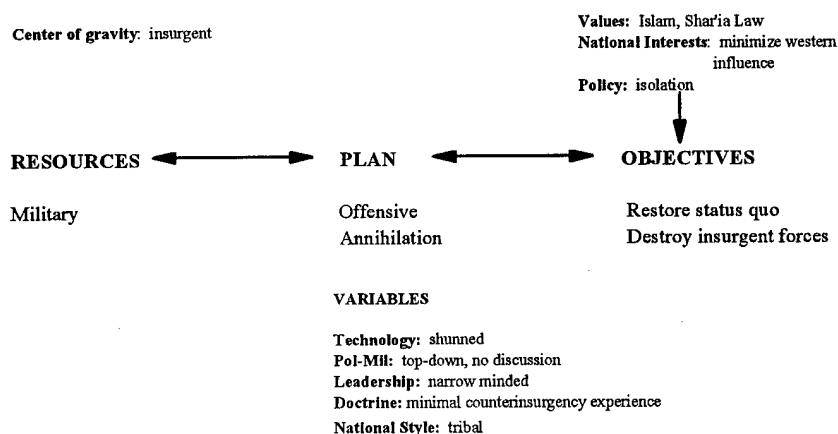
This sometimes well-founded perception of injustice among the peasantry is the source of support for a guerrilla rebellion that should be most easy for the government to eliminate or modify. In fact, however, it is very often the aspect of the conflict that governments are least aware of or willing to address. (17:7)

An open-minded, more benevolent approach to the problem by Sultan Sa'id could very well have eliminated the basis for the insurgency before it even started. Sultan Sa'id, however, chose to ignore the festering problem until the Dhofaris felt there was no other alternative than violent action against the state.

When confronted with a growing internal conflict, Sultan Sa'id continued to prove inflexible with little desire to improve the conditions of his people. He lacked a vision for the future that would unite his people in a common cause. Perhaps the many tumultuous years of his early rule combined with a strong desire for tradition usurped his energies and

clouded his better judgment. In the eyes of the Dhofaris, Sultan Sa'id lacked all legitimacy to lead.

Figure 9 illustrates Sultan Sa'id's flawed strategy for combating the insurgency. From the existing, but limited political, economic, and military elements of national power,



**Figure 9 Snyder Model--Sultan Said's Strategy**

Sultan Sa'id unwisely chose only the military element to achieve the national objectives. The national will in Oman appeared apathetic in the north and secession oriented in the south. The national objectives adopted by Sultan Sa'id failed to address the grievances of the Dhofari people. Never did civil development or distribution of civil aid enter the strategic equation. As a result, the national-military strategy focused only on a symptom of a much larger problem.

In combating the insurgency militarily, Sultan Sa'id lacked a credible coercive force. The SAF was not a well-trained, well-equipped, or disciplined fighting force. Instead, the military was small and possessed very little experience in counterinsurgency warfare. The lack of mobility due to poor national infrastructure, unfavorable terrain, and lack of equipment created a favorable environment for insurgent operations throughout the region.

The Sultan of Oman Air Force (SOAF) proved to be of negligible value. Suffering from extreme neglect and little direction, the SOAF consisted of "a handful of DC-3s and a couple of Provost piston engine fighters." (5:65) The air force clearly lacked the ability to provide effective close air support or any other meaningful support to the ground forces.

The Sultan and the military misidentified the center of gravity for the budding insurgency. As a result, the SAF's offensive strategy concentrated on attacking active insurgents. The SAF, however, lacked an effective intelligence network to identify insurgent leaders and methods of operation. Poor intelligence combined with a small army possessing little training in counterinsurgency warfare produced dismal results. The inability to direct the efforts of the armed forces against the insurgents complicated an already bad situation.

Unable to concentrate the application of violence on the active insurgents and their true supporters, the SAF bombed wadis, blew up and poisoned wells, and killed innocent people. (3:201) The indiscriminate use of violence by the armed forces only served to alienate a large portion of the Dhofar population. Rather than mobilize tribesmen in support of the government effort, the Sultan's strategy pushed the tribesmen further into the grasp of insurgent leaders.

Sultan Sa'id's approach to dealing with the insurgency produced a fundamental imbalance in the elements of Clausewitz's remarkable trinity (Figure 10). While Clausewitz developed his trinity with a more conventional war in mind, his concept has merit in the lower end of the conflict spectrum as well. Concerning the nature of the remarkable trinity, Clausewitz states in On War:

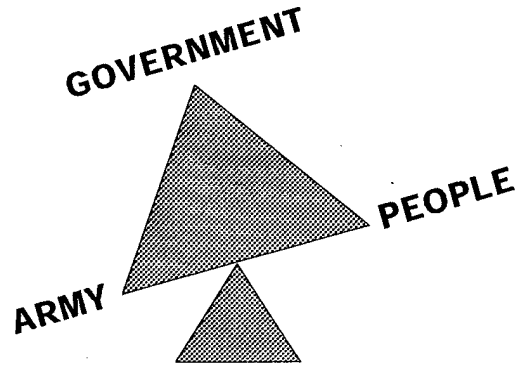


Figure 10 Remarkable Trinity (35:89)

As a total phenomenon its dominant tendencies always make war a paradoxical trinity-composed of primordial violence, hatred, and enmity, which are to be regarded as a blind natural force; of the play of chance and probability within which the creative spirit is free to roam; and of its element of subordination, as an instrument of policy, which makes it subject to reason alone. The first of these three aspects mainly concerns the people; the second the commander and his army; the third the government. (35:89)

Sultan Sa'id's faulty theory or lack of understanding of low intensity conflict produced an imperfect strategy that nearly led to the demise of Oman as a free and independent state. The balance of the trinity became unstable when the Sultan denied the Dhofaris access to simple modernization that could have significantly enhanced quality of life. Hatred and enmity formed against the Sultan. Once the insurgency began, the SAF's indiscriminate use of violence pushed the trinity further out of balance by continuing to alienate the people. The very limited understanding of low intensity conflict by both the Sultan and the SAF virtually ensured the ultimate collapse of the counterinsurgent effort.

As the time progressed, the situation grew worse. Robin Corbett states in Guerrilla Warfare From 1939 to the Present Day:

Despite pleas from his British advisors, he [Sultan Sa'id] would neither make concessions to the mountain tribes nor spend money from his growing oil revenues . . . on economic development or modern military equipment, other than to sanction a modest modernisation [sic] program for the SAF. (6:136)

By 1970, the insurgents controlled most of the Dhofar province. Communist victory appeared possible.

With the assistance of British officers, the Sultan's son Qaboos deposed his father in 1970. Concerning the abrupt change of power in Oman, Persian Gulf States: Country Studies states: "Although there had been no popular uprising associated with the coup, the change of rulers was greeted enthusiastically by Omanis, who had grown tired of Sa'id's stinginess, inflexible conservatism, and despotic rule." (4:341)

#### Sultan Qaboos

Educated in both the Arab world and the west (including Royal Military Academy Sandhurst), Qaboos had a much different outlook on the future of Oman than his father. (16:26-27) Ergo, Qaboos disagreed with his father's handling of the Omani people and growing insurgency. Kept in relative isolation by Sultan Sa'id (so as not to expose the people to his modern ideas), Qaboos was not in a position to influence the deteriorating situation. Upon deposing his father, however, Sultan Qaboos took action to eliminate repressive measures and institute a more benevolent approach with the Dhofar tribesmen.

John Akehurst states in We Won a War:

The new Sultan lost no time in promulgating the policies which he had worked out before coming to power. Ambitious plans for development, medicine and education were announced at once, an amnesty was granted and a cease-fire for two months declared. (1:19)

While not everything went smoothly in his transition to head of state, Sultan Qaboos recognized his shortcomings and took action to correct them. For example, "One of the

first decisions was to request more British military assistance-arms, supplies, and military men." (5:56) With the help of British advisors, Sultan Qaboos instituted a strategy of civil development supported by military operations. His civil-military strategy effectively integrated balanced development, mobilization, security, and neutralization programs. Placing himself in charge of all civil and military operations, Sultan Qaboos with British assistance skillfully executed an integrated strategy to defeat the revolutionary insurgency. Figure 11 illustrates Sultan Qaboos' strategy.

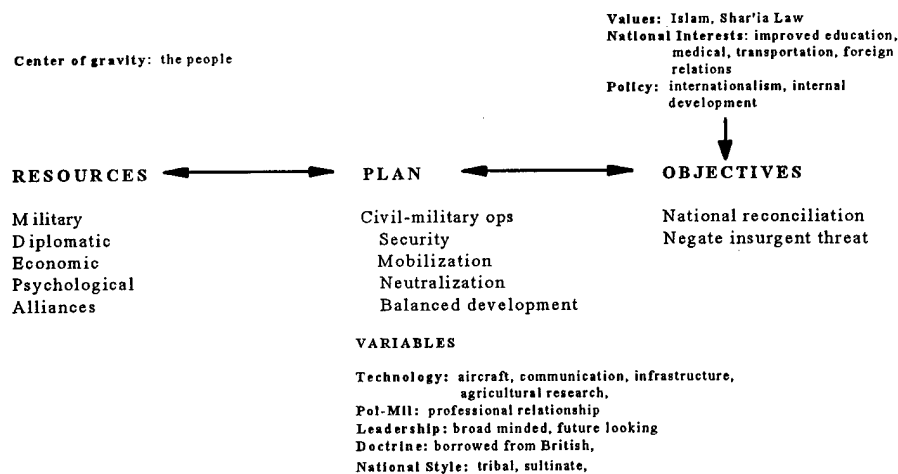


Figure 11 Snyder Model--Sultan Qaboos' Strategy

Sultan Qaboos breathed new life into the faltering nation. While recognizing the value of Oman's past, he did not believe tradition and internal development represented a fundamental dichotomy. He believed tradition and development could coexist while contributing to the future growth and stability of the nation. The accession of Sultan Qaboos provided Oman with a leader who possessed both a popular vision and the ability to communicate it to his people.



Sultan Qaboos recognized the center of gravity was not the active insurgents, but the Omani people. If the people could regain their confidence in the government, the

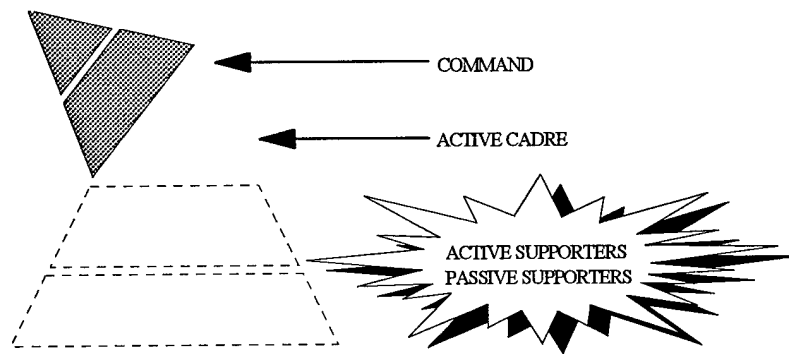


Figure 12 Insurgent Structure Destabilized (36:123)

insurgent structure would be destabilized and crumble (Figure 12). Thus, his new strategy would draw on the military, diplomatic, economic, and psychological elements of national power to achieve the national objectives. While military operations remained a top priority, civil operations assumed the lead with military operations creating a favorable environment for further civil action and development. As Colonel Tony Jeapes, a participant in the counterinsurgency effort, states in his book SAS: Operation Oman:

It was first and last a war about people, a war in which both sides concentrated upon winning the support of the civilians of the Jebel Dhofar and which was won in the end by civil development, with military action merely a means to that end." (16:11)

As a forceful and visionary leader, Sultan Qaboos established a national aim that appealed to both insurgents and loyal Omanis: " . . . defeat the communist rebels in Dhofar so that civil development could take place." (16:270) This national aim united the country in a struggle not against Dhofar tribesmen per se, but against communist insurgents.

Complementing his new civil-military strategy and policy of internal development, the Sultan initiated a new policy of internationalism. Pursuing this policy, Oman quickly established relations with neighboring nations. Several nations with an interest in preventing the spread of the communist insurgency provided political, economic, and military support. (4:344) The following excerpt from Persian Gulf: Country Studies highlights the extent of these external contributions:

In addition to the long-standing support of Britain and the more recent material and manpower sent by the shah [Iran], Oman received annual financial aid of around US\$200 million from Abu Dhabi . . . to assist civilian and military development projects and received around US\$2.5 billion from Saudi Arabia . . . . Training spaces in military schools were provided by armed forces personnel from Britain, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Pakistan. The UAE and Jordan occasionally provided troop units for guard duty in the north, thereby releasing Omani units for service in the Dhofar. (4:344-345)

In cases of direct military aid, Sultan Qaboos minimized donor publicity to keep the counterinsurgency focused on the perception of Omani control. In addition, he banned the foreign media to prevent the insurgents from gaining a larger propaganda base.

Sultan Qaboos' civil action programs were fundamental to the success of the government counterinsurgency effort. Upon taking power from his father, the Sultan immediately agreed to the demands for education, medical care, and other necessities. This action effectively neutralized the tribesmen original reasons for the insurgency. Follow-through on the part of the Sultan, however, would be the true measure of his integrity and commitment to a new national style.

Sultan Qaboos' departure from the style of his father became more evident as time progressed. Calvin Allen describes some of these changes in his book *Oman The Modernization of the Sultanate*:

. . . economic development in the early years of Qaboos' reign did begin to provide infrastructure and basic services. . . along with a second port at Raysut, near Salalah, hundreds of miles of paved and graded roads, a communications network, with radio and television stations in Muscat and Salalah, telephones, an expanded postal system, and an earth satellite station, and the first newspapers and magazines appeared. Social services such as schools and clinics opened throughout the country. Electrification began, and the search for new water resources, including the construction of a desalinization plant, was accelerated. (2:92)

By 1973, sixty-nine schools were in operation with an enrollment of 30,000 students. (8:20)

Medical facilities increased from two hospitals and ten clinics to eleven hospitals and thirty-five dispensaries. (8:20)

Within Dhofar itself, the government initiated both short-term and long-term civil action programs. After entering an enemy controlled area, soldiers "provided blankets, food, and other needed items, medics gave care to the local population, and veterinarians helped with their [tribesmen] cattle." (5:61) Upon securing the area, civil action teams constructed wells, schools, clinics, stores, and roads. (27:11) These relatively simple actions were very important in restoring faith in the traditional government. As D. L. Price points out, "These jabal centres [sic] may seem rudimentary; but to the inhabitants they represent the tangible presence of the government in areas where it has not been manifest in the past." (27:11)

While the Dhofar region represented only twelve percent of the nation's population, it received twenty-five percent of the total development capital between 1971 and 1975. (4:344) To further enhance development within Dhofar, the government initiated a

program to specifically target important aspects of the local economy. To accomplish this task, the government commenced research into improving the cattle, crops, and grasslands of the tribesmen. (27:11) While Sultan Qaboos' many civil action programs corrected past inequities, they also established a framework for future development. Improved visibility of the government in the day to day lives of the people greatly increased its perceived legitimacy.

Since most tribesmen were of the Islamic faith, the Sultan used communism's atheist ethic against the insurgent leaders. With most reasons for the insurgency now neutralized, religious faith became an important bond isolating the tribesmen from the insurgents. The government slogan, "Islam is our way, freedom is our aim" became the rallying cry of a struggling nation. (16:261) This slogan represents an example of the Sultan's successful attempt to link Islam, freedom, and the government. (16:261) Government radio and leaflets regularly served as the medium to reinforce this philosophy.

Sultan Qaboos designed the military portion of his strategy "to secure the Dhofar for civil development." (33:122) With British assistance, he expanded the SAF and provided counterinsurgency training to his soldiers. With better equipment, government forces frequently relied on improved mobility to quickly respond to insurgent threats. The Sultan further increased the effectiveness of military operations through concentration. Rather than attacking throughout the region, government forces cleared one section at a time. The clear-and-hold operation gradually regained control of the entire region.

An expanding air force played an important role in providing mobility and responsive fire support during military operations. Consisting of both fixed wing (Strikemasters, Skyvans, Hunters, Viscounts and BAC 111s) and helicopter (Hueys)

aircraft, the SOAF flew a variety of missions to include: close air support, interdiction, reconnaissance, medical evacuation and resupply. (5:65, 23:8) Who Will Win? authors Douglas Blaufarb and George Tanham describe the contribution of airpower in the following passage:

This air capability gave Brigadier Akehurst [commander of Dhofar military forces] a great improvement in mobility and flexibility: he now could carry out surprise heliborne operations and move reinforcements quickly and easily. Regular medical evacuations improved the morale of the troops and saved lives. Strike aircraft were never more than 15 minutes away . . . Oman was a superb example of quiet and accurate ground support . . . Some, including Brigadier Akehurst, would go so far as to say that they couldn't have won without it. (5:65-66)

The Sultan offered full pardons to all insurgents who lay down their arms. Many tribesmen who became disillusioned with communist practices (such as their atheist philosophy), now had an opportunity to reestablish themselves in Omani society. The government treated surrendering insurgents with kindness and respect. (16:259)

The surrendering insurgents were not forced to provide information concerning their activities. Most surrendering insurgents, however, provided valuable intelligence of their own free will. This information allowed the government to learn about the insurgent leaders and their operations. Thus, use of violence by government forces became more discriminating.

Surrendering insurgents often took up arms in support of government forces. The British Special Air Service (SAS), also known as British Army Training Team (BATT), were instrumental in training and developing positive relationships with the former insurgents or firqats. Colonel Niven states in Special Men Special War:

The Batt men of the SAS quickly established themselves as men of considerable influence with the members of the Jebali firqats whom they

trained and controlled. Not only did these Batt men speak quite good arabic [sic], they were at the forefront of the war and joined the firqats in action against the adoo [enemy]. . . . Furthermore, the Batt men had these Batt houses where one could go and meet them, get advice, sign on a friend or relative into one of the firqats or get a Batt medic (medical orderly) to come and visit a sick wife, deliver children, circumcise a son or sew up a favourite [sic] camel that had been injured by shell fragments or a mine. (22:29)

Once trained, firqats defended their own tribal areas against returning insurgents. Intimately familiar with the territory and inhabitants of their tribal areas, the firqats were very effective in gathering intelligence and fighting the adoo. While freeing government forces to conduct other operations, this important counterinsurgency technique also improved tribal-government relations.

With better intelligence, government forces identified logistics as a critical factor affecting insurgent operations. Government forces took measures to restrict the flow of supplies along the land route from Yemen to

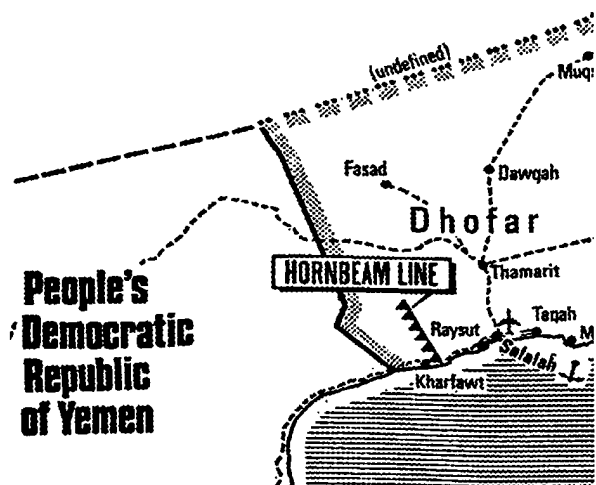


Figure 13 Hornbeam Line (27:10)

the Dhofar. he SAF constructed a series of obstacles along insurgent infiltration routes. The most famous of these obstacles was the Hornbeam Line. The Hornbeam Line (Figure 13) was a thirty-five mile long obstacle of barbed wire, sensors, mines and manned outposts.(27:8) The Hornbeam Line significantly decreased the flow of supplies to the insurgents and helped shift the SAF role from search and destroy to attrition and civil development. (27:10)

Ultimately, Sultan Qaboos took the destabilized trinity of his father and skillfully achieved a balance between the elements of government, army, and people (Figure 14). Sultan Qaboos' theory produced a workable strategy that regained the confidence of the people and maintained the integrity of a free and independent Oman. Recognition of the people as the center of gravity, use of British expertise in low intensity conflict, and improved training of the SAF contributed to rebalancing the trinity.

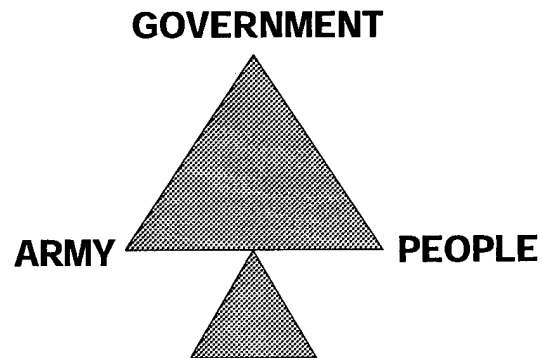


Figure 14 Remarkable Trinity (35:89)

The Oman insurgency concluded in 1975. Sultan Qaboos' civil-military strategy proved successful in defeating the communist effort to undermine the traditional government.

### Lessons Learned

Adversity is never pleasant, but sometimes it's possible to learn lessons from it that can be learned in no other way. (21:299)

Dealing with an insurgency is not a simple task for any government. Often, the easiest and quickest strategy involves the military option as selected by Sultan Sa'id. This strategy, however, typically does little more than attack a symptom of a greater underlying problem.

Exclusive use of a military strategy reflects the shortsightedness of government leadership and the inability or lack of desire to deal with the root causes of an insurgency. As the author of Modern Guerrilla Insurgency points out, "The most effective strategy for

bringing an insurgency under control is for the government to remove or mitigate the basic cause(s) of that insurgency." (17:211) Thus, the people or the 'hearts and minds' should represent the fundamental focus of any potential counterinsurgency strategy. Failure to recognize this axiom can result in a faulty counterinsurgency strategy, increased dissent amongst the populace, and possible loss of the conflict.

Victory can take much time for either the government or the insurgency to achieve. Insurgency by nature is a protracted struggle. Therefore, unlike Clausewitzian theory, the government and the insurgents cannot expect a decisive battle to determine the outcome. (17:6) As Army Field Manual 100-20 states, " . . . victory in an insurgency belongs to the side which has the stronger psychological commitment, which possesses the greater political and military skills, and which makes the least mistakes." (14:2-5)

The outcome of the Oman insurgency was determined in a similar fashion. Once the government met the original Dhofari demands, active and passive supporters quickly lost their commitment to the insurgency. Skillful use of the political and military elements of power helped the government reassert control over the entire Dhofar region. Critical insurgent errors complicated their tenuous position and provided areas for exploitation by the government. Some of these errors include the following:

- Misidentifying the center of gravity as the Omani government and army.
- Failing to provide a valid reason for the insurgency after the government fulfilled the Dhofaris' original demands.
- Operating on a single weak supply line.
- Attempting to replace the tribesmen's Islamic faith with atheism.
- Relying on violent coercion to maintain Dhofari loyalty.



In contrast, the government under the leadership of Sultan Qaboos recovered from earlier mistakes and took full advantage of the insurgents' errors. Significant government achievements in combating the insurgency include the following:

- Establishing strong leadership capable of communicating clear political objectives. (5:68)
- Recognizing the true center of gravity as the people.
- Creating a civil development program that effectively removed the tribesmen's perception of injustice and increased the perceived legitimacy of the government.
- Creating a credible coercive force capable of conducting military operations in support of civil development.
- Establishing a popular vision and national aim that appealed to both loyal and insurgent Omanis.
- Establishing an effective intelligence network.
- Establishing supportive relationships with surrounding nations.
- Restricting supplies and support to the insurgents.

Clearly, Sultan Qaboos' recognition of insurgency's inherent political nature and use of the military in a supporting role produced a winning counterinsurgency strategy. Colonel Tony Jeapes summed it up best when he said: "Winning a counter-revolutionary war is like clearing a garden of weeds: it is what you plant afterwards that matters." (16:236-237)

### Summary

Inflexible and narrow-minded, Sultan Sa'id rejected internal development as an encroachment on traditional Omani society. He lacked a vision for the future that would unite his people. When confronted with an insurgency, Sultan Sa'id chose the military element of national power as the predominant means of dealing with the deteriorating situation. Unfortunately, in combating the insurgency, Sultan Sa'id lacked a credible

coercive force. Although the PFLOAG misidentified the true center of gravity and often maintained support of the Dhofaris through coercion, they gained considerable influence in the Dhofar region.

Deposing his father in 1970 with the assistance of British officers, Sultan Qaboos initiated much needed reforms. Recognizing the people as the true center of gravity, Sultan Qaboos instituted a strategy of civil development supported by military operations. As a forceful and visionary leader, Sultan Qaboos established a national aim that appealed to both insurgent and loyal Omanis. In the final analysis, "The insurgents faced insurmountable odds with a charismatic sultan, oil income, civil action team development projects, the firqat, the multinational military force, and the lack of appeal to their cause."

(2:74) The next chapter assesses the relevance of the Oman insurgency to current world conflict.

## **CHAPTER V**

### ***RELEVANCE TO CURRENT WORLD CONFLICT***

#### ***Turkey and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK)***

*Learning history is easy; learning its lessons is almost impossible. (21:299)*

Does low intensity conflict have any relevance to current world conflict? The answer is an emphatic yes! As Figure 1 illustrated in chapter I, the probability of low intensity conflict is extremely high when compared to the probability of either conventional or nuclear conflict. In fact, the actual number of low intensity conflicts currently plaguing the world is surprising. The Summer 1994 PIOOM Newsletter and Progress Report lists 84 lower intensity conflicts in areas from Central and South America to Central and East Asia. (25:20-21) This large number of lower intensity conflicts supports Anthony James Joes' statement in chapter I concerning the many festering problems around the globe. (17:5)

Does low intensity conflict have an effect outside national or regional borders? The answer again is an emphatic yes! To substantiate this statement, one need look no further than the current newspaper. Four potential candidates include, but are not limited to: (1) the brutal ethnic conflict in the former Yugoslavia; (2) the violent conflict in the breakaway republic of Chechnya; (3) the spread of violent Islamic fundamentalism in Algeria; and (4) the bitter struggle for Kurdish autonomy in Turkey. All four conflicts demonstrate significant actual or potential influences outside their own national or regional borders. When historical ties and alliances (political, economic, military) are added to the equation, it becomes self-evident how one nation's problems can adversely affect another nation's

interests. In many cases, low intensity conflict represents a potential time bomb capable of rapidly escalating to higher levels in the spectrum of conflict.

The struggle for Kurdish autonomy is particularly interesting because of its many similarities to the Oman situation and its impact outside Turkish national borders. While this low intensity conflict was once called "the war the world forgot," (18:1) it is quickly becoming important to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the United Nations (UN), and the United States (US). The reasons the struggle for Kurdish autonomy is of interest to NATO, the UN and the US include the following:

- Turkey is a member of NATO. Security concerns and actions of a member state have an impact on the entire organization.
- Turkey may be violating human rights. (19:24)
  - Arrests of journalists
  - Imprisoning Kurdish parliament members
  - Forced resettlement of Kurdish villages
- Weapons supplied by NATO nations are possibly being used to fight the Kurds. (18:1)
- Weapons supplied by the US are possibly being used to fight the Kurds. (9:14)
- Cost of war is draining Turkish economy, forcing reductions in health and education spending. (7:3)
- Operation Provide Comfort (protection of Kurds in Iraq) is flown from Turkey. (18:1)
- The US has military bases in Turkey useful in projecting interests abroad. (9:14)
- Kurdish terrorist attacks have spread to the heart of Europe (June 1993).

Clearly, NATO, the UN, and the US have vested interests in Turkey's fight against the Kurds.

In the context of Turkey and the militant Kurdish organization PKK, the opening quotation of this chapter is all too true. While the lessons and principles derived from the Oman insurgency are not necessarily a "cookbook approach" to dealing with low intensity

conflict, they certainly provide a starting point for understanding and dealing with low intensity conflict. Blatant disregard of historical lessons and principles without vindicable reason(s) can often lead to disaster. A brief examination of the still ongoing Turkish struggle against the PKK highlights the similarities and continuing relevance of the Oman insurgency to current world conflict.

### Background

While the PKK is a twentieth century phenomenon, its origin is inseparably tied to the historical roots of the broader Kurdish problem. After settling in the area of what is now eastern Turkey, western Iran, and northern Iraq nearly four thousand years ago, Kurdish nationalism became a significant factor following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. (13:5) In January 1918, President Wilson raised Kurdish hopes for an independent homeland during an address to Congress in which he outlined his vision of the postwar world. (15:54) Unfortunately, all Kurdish hopes for an independent homeland were dashed with formal recognition of modern Turkey under Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk) in 1923. Perceiving Kurdish nationalism as a threat to Turkish territorial integrity, Ataturk and subsequent leaders embarked on repressive programs of forced assimilation. (13:123) Designed to eliminate Kurdish identity, these programs bred hostility and fear among the Kurdish people.

During the 1970s, the government eased political repression slightly. As a result, many small political groups emerged. One of these groups became the forerunner of the PKK. Under the astute leadership of Abdullah Ocalan, a handful of Kurdish students at Ankara University laid the foundation for the PKK. Political liberalization gradually led to instability within Turkey. To reestablish stability, the Turkish military overthrew the

civilian government in 1980. A crackdown on the many radical political groups soon followed. Abdullah Ocalan and his followers escaped to Syria where they reestablished the PKK under the protection of Syria. For the next four years, the PKK trained and indoctrinated forces for the Kurdish cause. In 1984, the PKK began a war of independence.

Today, the Kurds remain a huge ethnic minority of some twenty-four million people. Approximately ten to twelve million Kurds, representing approximately twenty percent of the population, live in Turkey (primarily in southeast). (7:3) With distinct language and culture, the Kurds are a unique people within Turkey. As one individual aptly said, "The Kurds are homeless even at home, and stateless abroad." (15:60)

### Insurgency

The PKK is an outgrowth of frustration over the Kurdish perception of social and political injustice. While the Kurds have maintained a unique ethnic identity (language and culture) for centuries, they believe they are being forced to assimilate into what is perceived as a foreign culture. Turkey, however, believes the Kurds are Turks and must remain an inseparable part of the nation. Government incentives for assimilation are often extremely harsh and in some cases barbaric. Consequently, many Kurds feel they have no other choice than armed conflict to preserve their ethnic identity and fulfill their nationalistic desires. Figure 15 illustrates the PKK strategy in the struggle for Kurdish autonomy in Turkey. PKK strategy has a striking similarity to PFLOAG strategy during the Oman insurgency.

The PKK originally sought a free and independent Kurdistan in what is now southeast Turkey, northern Iraq, western Iran, and northern Syria. This objective,

however, turned out to be unrealistic due to differing aspirations of the various Kurdish elements. Recent events indicate the PKK has modified the strategic objective to include the possibility of a federated Kurdistan under Turkey. (20:179)

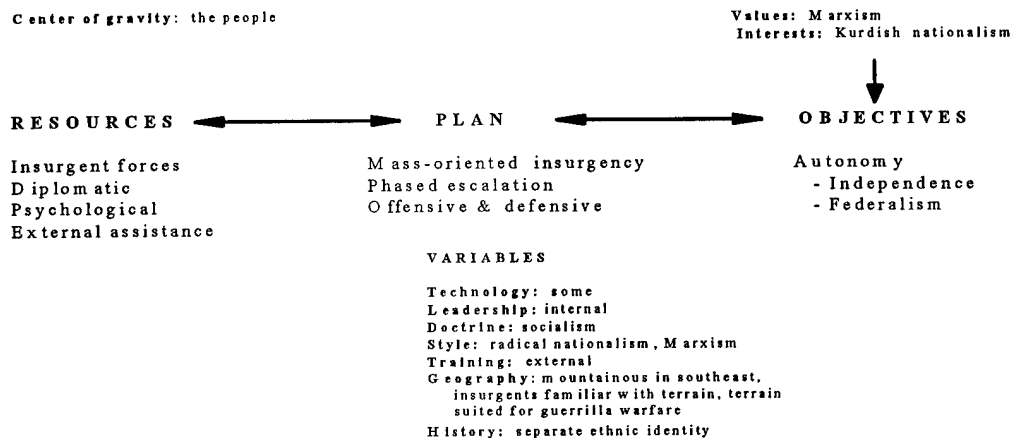


Figure 15 Snyder Model --PKK Strategy

Like the PFLOAG and its Marxist ideology, the PKK bases its strategy on Maoist and Marxist-Lenninist revolutionary ideas. (28:371) While religion became a key factor in the Omani insurgency, it is downplayed by the PKK and as result has not become a serious divisive factor. Focusing on government injustice and inflexibility, Abdullah Ocalan has made the PKK an appealing organization to a significant portion of the Kurdish population in Turkey. Ergo, the PKK has grown in size and stature. Beginning with only a handful of followers, the PKK is now a well-trained force of several thousand independence seeking patriots.

Repressive government measures, like those of Sultan Sa'id, created bitter feelings among a large segment of the Kurdish population. As a result, the PKK has been able to establish a fairly strong base of active and passive supporters. In many cases, PKK reprisals against Kurds who do not provide support have also been severe. Unlike the

PFLOAG, the PKK leadership recognized the problems associated with strong arm tactics and has taken action to reduce these kinds of incidents. (13:87)

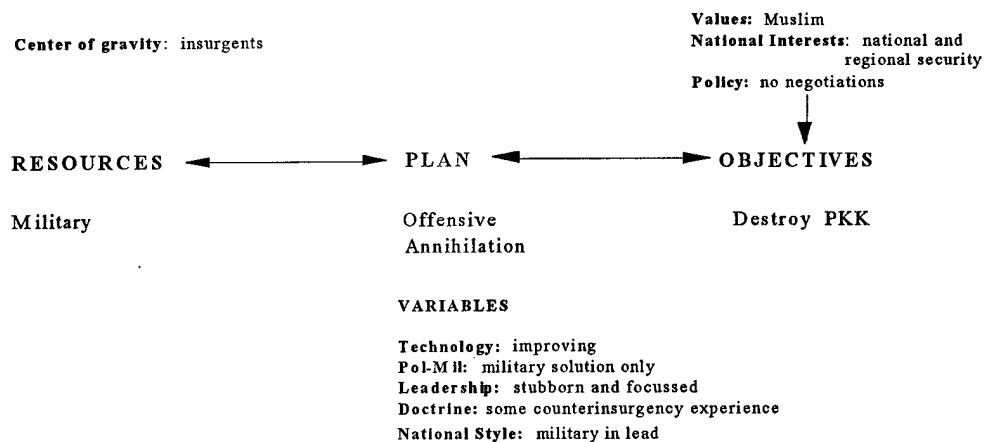
Like the Dhofar region of Oman, southeast Turkey provides a favorable operating area both geographically and economically to the PKK. Southeast Turkey is mountainous and economically underdeveloped. Rugged terrain, poor roads, and difficult communication all support PKK infiltration and movement. Minimal government infusion of aid to develop schools, health care, and jobs contributes to a feeling of Kurdish inequality. (13:125)

Like the PFLOAG, the PKK requires external support to ensure effective and efficient operations. Assuming no changes in the level of external support, the PKK can continue operations indefinitely. Unfortunately, the long term reliability of external supporters may be questionable. Most external supporters do not believe in the PKK cause; instead, they support the PKK to further their own national agenda in the region. Moral and political support to the PKK is limited at this time. While the plight of the Kurds is recognized by most nations around the world, few nations are willing to take an active role in solving the problem.

### Counterinsurgency

Turkey has consistently viewed all forms of Kurdish nationalism as a threat to national integrity. Therefore, the government's approach to the Kurdish problem has been harsh. As illustrated in Figure 16, Turkish strategy in dealing with the PKK is strikingly similar to Sultan Sa'id's strategy in dealing with the DLF and PFLOAG.





**Figure 16 Snyder Model--Turkey's Strategy**

Turkeys' leaders, like Sultan Sa'id, appear narrow-minded and quite inflexible. Negotiations with the PKK are not an option according to Prime Minister Tansu Ciller. (26:6) Misidentification of the center of gravity by the government further complicates the situation. Instead of focusing on the people, the government concentrates the majority of its effort on attacking and suppressing the insurgents. Civil action and development programs are not a high priority. Therefore, in the eyes of many Kurds, the Turkish government lacks legitimacy. As a result, Clausewitz's remarkable trinity (government, people, army) is severely out of balance.

From the diplomatic, economic, psychological and military elements of power, the Turkish government chose the military element as the primary means of dealing with the insurgency. Nearly exclusive use of the military element reflects the short sightedness of government policy and inability or lack of desire to deal with the root causes of Kurdish discontent.

The basic plan entails using the offensive whenever and wherever possible in order to annihilate and ultimately destroy the PKK. In the early years of the insurgency, the Turkish military forces were less adept at accomplishing their mission. Major problems

included poor communication, limited intelligence, inferior equipment and scant training in counterinsurgency procedures. (13:80,82) Due to these and other factors, application of force was often indiscriminate. Indiscriminate use of force pushed many Kurds firmly into the PKK sphere of influence. Examples of indiscriminate and excessive force include:

- Forced evacuation of Kurdish villages - 800 since 1990 (31:47)
- Torching of Kurdish villages (31:47)
- Use of death squads (24:28)
- Denial of basic rights

Continued harsh and undirected violence by the military, supported by the government, will only further alienate the people.

Over the years, the military has improved its capability to employ coercive force. Currently, Turkey fields more than 220,000 soldiers in the fight against the PKK. (7:3) Improved mobility and better communications has greatly aided the Turkish military. Supported by US supplied helicopter gunships and other warplanes, the military claimed over 3000 guerrillas killed in 1994. (7:3) Despite giving the military a free hand, Prime Minister Tansu Ciller was unable to make good on her vow to crush the rebels in 1994. (31:47)

Fiscal expenditures in the campaign to suppress the PKK are high. Estimated yearly cost of the government campaign is six billion dollars. (31:47) While exclusive use of the military option may seriously damage the PKK, military force will not eliminate the underlying causes of Kurdish discontent.

Bringing Clausewitz's trinity back into balance is an absolute must. Like Oman, a more prudent solution for Turkey might be a strategy characterized by military operations creating opportunities for civil action and development programs. Rather than spending

six billion dollars fighting the PKK, a portion of that money would be better spent on civil action and development programs to correct past wrongs and win the support of the Kurdish people.

### **Summary**

There are many low intensity conflicts in progress around the world today. The majority of these conflicts have significant influences outside national and regional borders. The bitter struggle for Kurdish autonomy is one such example. Turkey has consistently viewed all forms of Kurdish nationalism as a threat to national integrity. Employing a strategy very similar to Sultan Sa'id during the Oman insurgency, the Turkish government has focused the majority of its effort on a military solution. Narrow-minded and inflexible, the government has failed to recognize the Kurdish people as the true center of gravity. While use of military force may seriously damage the PKK, it will in the long term do little to eliminate the root causes of Kurdish discontent.

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **CONCLUSION**

*If historical experience teaches us anything about revolutionary guerrilla war, it is that military measures alone will not suffice. (17:5)*

*Mao Tse-tung*

As the quotation from Mao states and the outcome of the struggle in Oman suggests, military measures alone will not suffice in an insurgency. (17:5) Therefore in low intensity conflict, the government response must carefully integrate civil-military operations to counteract and eliminate insurgent power bases. The government must fully recognize and support the primacy of civil operations.

This paper has shown that Oman ultimately recognized the primacy of civil operations thereby permitting itself to employ a winning civil-military strategy in combating a low intensity threat. The elements of this strategy, however, should not be viewed as Jominian principles to be followed blindly in the pursuit of victory. Each insurgency should be evaluated and fought based on its own merits. Nevertheless, analyzing and assessing the government strategy employed in the Oman insurgency is useful in that it gives as Clausewitz said:

. . . the mind insight into the great mass of phenomena and of their relationships, then leave it free to rise into the higher realms of action. There the mind can use its innate talents to capacity, combining them all so as to seize on what is right and true . . . (35:3)

The world is a constantly changing place. The potential for future low intensity conflict is a real and perhaps growing threat. One need look no further than the newspaper to see that low intensity conflict is occurring around the globe. Examination of

the Turkish struggle suggests the lessons and principles associated with the Oman insurgency are relevant today.

Therefore, the traditional view of warfare must continue to include the less understood spectrum of low intensity conflict. Study of the 1963-1975 Oman insurgency and other contemporary insurgencies will help place low intensity conflict in the proper perspective. As George Santyana once said, "Those who do not know the past, are condemned to repeat it." (29:n/a)

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